

Report of the
Committee of Seven on
the Functions and
Authority of the General
Conference

TO THE FOREIGN MISSIONS
CONFERENCE FOR 1917

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF SEVEN ON THE FUNCTIONS AND AUTHORITY OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

In the interest of an accurate, historical statement, a word here is necessary as to the reason for the appointment of this committee in January, 1916. For several years it had been apparent that there was an undefined but very real question in the minds of many members of the Conference as to whether or not the Conference was in danger of assuming too much authority and moving unconsciously toward a centralization of power that would be dangerous. This undefined fear crystallized about the report of the Committee on Revision of the Constitution, which was made in 1916, and which had endeavored to allay this fear, but without entire success. The report as then made was finally adopted after the suggestion had been agreed to that the functions of the Conference should be defined more clearly by a special committee to report this year, 1917. It was in the endeavor to solve this latter problem that the Committee of Seven was appointed. The resolution under which the committee is acting is as follows:

Resolved, That a Special Committee of Seven be appointed to prepare a statement which shall define more clearly what are the functions and authority of the Conference and the conditions and responsibilities of membership in the Conference; that this statement be put into such form that it may become a part of the Constitution of the Conference; and that the Committee submit said statement to the boards as a proposed amendment, so that it may be legally voted upon at the next meeting of the Conference, and that in submitting said statement to the Boards they be requested to take action upon the same." The following Committee was appointed: Charles R. Watson, Convener; Stanley White, James Endicott, John W. Wood, James L. Barton, Frank Mason North, Miss Mabel Head.

The Committee has held three meetings in addition to a preliminary meeting for organization. It has earnestly sought to discharge the duties laid upon it and to suggest such definitions of the functions of the Conference as will not only clarify the purposes for which the Conference was organized, but also allay any feeling that the Conference is endangering the individuality of the members or falling into the control of a particular group of persons. As a result of the deliberations of the Committee, a letter was sent to all of the Boards represented in the Conference, outlining the proposed report and requesting amendment, criticism and action. The amendments with the articles of the Constitution to which they relate are here given as follows:

OBJECT

Present Article:

OBJECT

This Conference is organized primarily for the consideration of questions relating to the Administration of Foreign Missions and for the investigation and consideration of matters of practical interest to the participating Boards and Societies. It is the agent of all the Societies, individually and collectively, for securing information and for promoting the measures that shall conserve the best interests of all. The value of all its declarations will in a large measure rest in the thoroughness of its investigations, in the sanity of its methods of procedure, and in the reasonableness of its conclusions. The object of the Conference is to foster and promote a true science of missions.

The meetings of the Conference are not held for the purpose of exploiting or endorsing the work of any organization or society; therefore the time of the meetings shall not be taken up for this purpose, except as called for by some Conference Committee.

1. That the section be changed to read as follows:

FUNCTIONS

The functions of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America are to provide for an Annual Conference of the Foreign Missions Boards and Societies of North America; to provide, through its Committees, for the investigation and study of missionary problems; to foster and promote a true science of missions; and to itself perform directly or through its Committees certain specific work of interest to Boards and Societies participating in the Conference. It is not within the scope of the Conference to consider questions of ecclesiastical faith and order which represent denominational differences.

2. That the following section be added:

AUTHORITY

The Conference and its Committees represent the participating Boards and Societies in the sense of possessing unique opportunity for knowing the mind and policies of these several missionary agencies and of enjoying direct contact with their administrative activities. The influence and usefulness of the Conference will depend upon the thoroughness of its investigations, the soundness of its methods of procedure, and the reasonableness of its conclusions and recommendations. The Conference being a purely voluntary association of Boards and Societies, neither it nor any of its Committees has authority to commit the participating Boards and Societies to any position, policy or course of action, except as any of the participating Boards and Societies may, under the provisions of the Section on Voting, request or authorize the Conference or its Committees to act.

MEETINGS

Present Article:

MEETINGS

The meetings shall be held annually in January, at such time and place as may be designated by the preceding Conference or by the Committee of Arrangements.

3. That the section be amended to read as follows:

MEETINGS

A meeting shall be held annually in January at such time and at such place as may be designated by the preceding Conference or by the Committee of Reference and Counsel.

The meetings of the Conference are not held for the purpose of exploiting or endorsing the work of any organization or society; therefore, the time of the meeting shall not be taken up for this purpose, except as called for by some Conference Committee.

MEMBERSHIP

Present Article:

MEMBERSHIP

Foreign missionary boards and societies, having separate church constituencies in the United States and Canada, whose annual incomes are less than \$20,000 shall be entitled to be represented in the Foreign Missions Conference of North America by one executive officer or elected delegate. Boards or societies having incomes between \$20,000 and \$100,000 shall be entitled to be represented by three delegates, including executive officers. Boards or societies having incomes over \$100,000 shall be entitled to one additional delegate for each additional \$100,000 or fraction thereof. Boards and societies having incomes over \$800,000 shall be entitled to one additional delegate for each additional \$200,000 or fraction.

Boards or societies conducting both home and foreign missions shall base their representation on their income or pro rata expenditure for foreign missions.

For purposes of representation in the Conference, the income of a woman's board or society of foreign missions, whether auxiliary or independent of the general board of the church to which it belongs, may be included as part of the income of such general board, provided that said board base its pro rata contribution toward the expenses of the Conference upon such inclusion.

The secretary of the Conference shall furnish suitable credential blanks to the constituent boards and societies at least sixty days in advance of the meeting of the Conference.

The basis of representation of the following Societies, because of their close relations to foreign missionary work as interdenominational co-operating agencies which send out missionaries, in consultation with the Church Boards and Societies, to serve the common interest, shall be the same as that of the Societies having separate church constituencies:

The American Bible Society.

The International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations.

The Foreign Department of the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association.

The following Societies, because of their close relation to foreign missionary work as interdenominational co-operating agencies which serve the common interest at the home base, in consultation with the Church Boards and Societies, shall be entitled to one delegate each:

The Missionary Education Movement.

The Student Volunteer Movement.

The Laymen's Missionary Movement.

The American Tract Society.

The World's Sunday School Association.

Distinguished guests, foreign missionaries, members of Foreign Mission Boards and Societies who are not delegates, and officers and members of the Executive Committees of international and denominational agencies directly interested in foreign missionary work, may be invited by the Committee of Arrangements to sit as corresponding members, with the privilege of participation in the discussions, but without power to vote.

4. That the third paragraph be made to read as follows:

For purposes of representation in the Conference, the income of a Woman's Board or Society of Foreign Missions, whether auxiliary or independent of the General Board of the Church to which it belongs, may be included as part of the income of such General Board, and the General Board shall, if practicable, arrange with the Woman's Board for its proportionate representation in the Conference.

5. That after this section, the following section be added:

VOTING

Each fully accredited delegate, present at any meeting of the Conference, is entitled to a vote. When the Conference is expressing its judgment as a Conference upon matters properly coming before it, a two-thirds vote shall be required. Votes are to be regarded as the expression of the personal judgment of the members of the Conference and do not therefore commit the respective Boards and Societies. If any Board or Society participating in the Conference, or if the Conference itself, by a two-thirds vote of the members present at any regular meeting, propose a measure which would commit the participating Boards and Societies to a given position, policy, or course of action, this measure shall first be submitted to the Boards and Societies involved, for their formal approval. When the measure has been approved by a majority of the number of votes to which the Boards involved would be entitled in the Conference, the Conference or any of its Committees may proceed to take such action as the vote would justify, provided always that said action shall be represented as taken in behalf only of the Boards and Societies that have approved the measure proposed.

EXPENSES

Present Article:

EXPENSES

The expenses of the delegates shall be met by their respective Boards or by the delegates themselves. In addition, for the general expenses of the Conference, each Board and Society shall be asked to contribute in proportion to the income which forms its basis of representation.

6. That the section be amended to read as follows:

EXPENSES

The expenses of the delegates shall be met by their respective Boards or by the delegates themselves. In addition, for the general expenses of the Conference and its affiliated activities, each Board and Society shall be asked to contribute directly or indirectly, in proportion to the income which forms the basis of its representation, but any Board may, for reasons, contribute less than this amount or designate its contribution exclusively to specific portions of the budget of the Conference and such action shall in no wise affect the membership or standing of said Board or Society in the Conference.

ADDITIONAL AMENDMENT

7. That in the section entitled "Committees" the sentence beginning "No member of the Conference shall be eligible," etc., be amended to read as follows:

"No member of a Standing Committee shall be eligible for re-election as a member of that Committee until after the lapse of one year subsequent to the expiration of his term of office."

These amendments are proposed with a view to defining more clearly the functions and authority of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America. The Committee is of the opinion that the anxieties and dissatisfaction which led to the Committee's appointment were of two sorts: on the one hand, there were those who preferred to limit the Conference to its purely conferential functions and who would have had all formal action or executive activity carried on apart from the Conference, by such Committees as the Boards interested in each proposed activity might choose to appoint. On the other hand, there were those who were not averse to the Conference and its Committees engaging in executive activities, such as had characterized the past, but who felt that the Constitution of the Conference should provide adequate definition of the scope of such activities and particularly of the methods of procedure to be followed in securing authorization for such activities.

The Committee carefully considered both views and finally became committed to the second, chiefly for the following reasons: (a) It was convinced that the prevailing judgment in the Conference is averse to either the abandonment of the enterprises and activities now carried on by the Conference, or to the committal of these activities to numerous independent committees or to a group of Boards organized separately from the Conference for the administration of these activities. (b) It further felt that the deepest anxieties of those who wished to limit the Conference to its purely conferential character could be relieved and their desires largely met by a clear definition of the functions of the Conference and of the limited sense in which it is representative of the Boards, and by clearer and more definite regulations governing the methods of procedure where measures are proposed calling for action.

In general, the amendments proposed are thought to secure the following ends:

(1) Boards and Societies are not individually committed to any measure by a mere vote of the Conference.

(2) With that understanding, however, the Conference may, as may any popular gathering, express its own judgment as a Conference and may initiate action.

(3) Where any action or measure is of such a character as

to commit given Boards to a position or policy or course of action: (a) The initiative in such a measure is safeguarded by being vested either in a Board's formal request for such a measure, or in such a general desire of the Conference for it as will command a two-thirds vote; and (b) the measure must be overtured to the Boards concerned; and (c) action can only be taken when the measure has gained approval such as will be indicated by a majority of the total number of votes which the Boards involved would command in a regular meeting of the Conference.

(4) Membership in the Conference does not depend upon financial contribution to the budget, neither is it affected adversely by unwillingness, for reasons, to contribute to the Conference budget.

In submitting these amendments, the Committee also submits for adoption by the next Conference the following resolution:

"The provisions of these newly proposed amendments are not retroactive, nor shall they be interpreted as undermining the authority and legitimacy of measures and activities previously approved by the Conference and in operation at the time of the adoption of these amendments."

While the Committee's direct commission related only to a definition of the functions and authority, the responsibilities and membership of the Conference, the members of the Committee united in recommending the amendment designated above "Additional Amendment," as it was their opinion that a more rigid adherence to the rotary principle of Committee appointments would help to relieve much of the dissatisfaction which has been referred to and keep Committees more perfectly in touch with the wide and varied views represented in the Conference.

Replies after receiving this communication have come from twenty-two Boards, the total number of Boards communicated with being fifty-six. Of these, the following Boards have approved the amendments in toto: The Board of Foreign Missions of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America; The Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention; The Foreign Department of the International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations; Foreign Missionary Society, United Brethren in Christ; The Board of Foreign Missions of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America; Foreign Missionary Association of Friends of Philadelphia; The Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America; The General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists; Missionary Education Movement

of the United States and Canada; Board of Foreign Missions, Reformed Church in the United States; The Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Protestant Church.

Five of the Boards, namely, The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; The Moravian Church in America; American Friends Board of Foreign Missions; The Board of Foreign Missions, Reformed Church in America; have suggested changes as follows:

The American Board heartily endorsed all the proposed amendments except the Additional Amendment, and suggested that the maximum term of service be two terms rather than one term. This Board also suggested that the phrase beginning at the end of the third line of the section entitled "Functions" be made to read: "and itself to perform directly or through its Committees any specific work of interest to Boards and Societies participating in the Conference."

The Moravian Church formally approved the proposed amendments, but the Secretary was instructed to voice doubts as to the advisability of the Additional Amendment.

The American Friends' Board favored the amendments proposed, but believed it may be well to omit the Additional Amendment, "believing that rigid adherence to the practice there set forth would probably result in a decrease of efficiency in the work of the Conference."

The Presbyterian Board suggested three minor changes as follows: (1) That in the section entitled "Meetings," the words "this purpose" be made to read "the presentation of such work." (2) That in the section entitled "Voting," the word "first" in the seventh line be dropped. (3) That in the section on "Membership" we be very sure that our proposals are acceptable to a Board organized like the Methodist Board."

The Board of the Reformed Church in America voted unanimously in favor of the first six amendments but against the adoption of the seventh amendment.

Your Committee would report to the Conference the following resolutions:

1. That the suggested changes in so far as they relate to the first six sections of the amendments proposed, be adopted.
2. That the report as thus amended, with the exception of the additional amendment, be adopted as a whole.
3. That the additional amendment be changed so that it will read "after a lapse of one year subsequent to the expiration of his second term of office."

All of which is respectfully submitted.

CHARLES R. WATSON, *Chairman*.

STANLEY WHITE.

JAMES ENDICOTT.

JOHN W. WOOD.

JAMES L. BARTON.

FRANK M. NORTH.

MISS MABEL HEAD.